

*Stefan Arteni*

# UDIGMA



SolInvictus Press 2012



traveling east or west  
light and free  
on the road

I don't know whether  
I'm on the way  
or at home

*Muso Soseki*

*Udigma* is a concept introduced by Mihai Rogobete as a *Leitwort* for thinking and as a sort of antidote to the spiritual impoverishment of contemporary man. It describes an other way of being on the way. This essay develops a new application of the term to describe what lies behind or beneath certain stylistic matrices.

The word *udigma* is derived from the Greek *ou* + *deigma*. *Ou* means no, not. *Deigma* derives from *deiknynai* which means to show, to point out, to indicate. The Indo-European root *deik-* means to show, to point out, to pronounce solemnly. Cognate words are the Greek *dike* [judgement, justice], the Latin *dicere* [to speak, tell, say], the Latin *dicare* [to proclaim, dedicate], the Gothic *taikns* [sign].

The manifestly apophatic character of *udigma* raises the question: how does one interpret the negation in an apophatic utterance?

Mircea Vulcanescu offers a hint: "...`Not to be' does not have an absolute meaning for a Romanian. All ontology is for him regional, and all Being is mode of being...The Romanian negation does not have an existential character, it has an essential one. The Romanian is always opposed to a mode of being, not to the fact of being...Every time the Romanian negates by saying 'it is not', his negation is only relative. It is always assumed that 'it is not here, it is not there, it is not so, it is not yet, it is not this'...There is no non-Being".

And Simona Modreanu (1) comments as follows: "...for a Romanian, invisible entities do exist to the same extent as visible ones, even when a spatial dimension is lacking. Mircea Vulcanescu has written...that, for the archaic Romanian spirit, our world is not a place of *presences* in the sense of actualist metaphysics. It presupposes entities which have been but are no longer, as well as entities that might be but are not yet. The actual and the virtual...intersect, and *beyond* does not mean *outside*, but *otherwise*, indicating not a spatial borderline but another quality of being, thus bestowing on existence an inefable poetry of freedom and irreality. Duration and eternity are mixed in the Romanian conscience, which has created that special term: *pururea* or *de-apururi*, practically untranslatable in any other tongue [one may tentatively translate it as 'forever, without interruption']. Therefore, the Romanian view of Being contains an element of aspatiality and achrony...What differentiates the Romanian negation from the Western one in general, is...its purely determinative and limitative function which consists in not

abolishing that which it negates, but in building a parallel reality which, far from wearing away the first one, adds itself to it”.

The paradox of the apophatic way is that it always points back to affirmation, or, as Heidegger puts it: “This thinking comes before, that is to say it moves forward – precisely by means of the step back”. By taking a backward step into one’s own observing, one becomes “aware nothingness” and is “brought thereby into perplexity and wonderment” as Plotinus phrases it (2). By means of this meditative step back, back behind all ways of deSIGNation, one reaches the real plane of creativity which should be the level of possibilities and of virtualities, the level where all things exist in all their ways of being, actualized and nonactualized. Not only one has to involve negations but also junctional operations like conjunction and disjunction into this transjunctional game. The relationship between the forming of form and the emergence of possibility from within virtuality becomes autopoietic (3) - the connection between the emergence of play and ritual.

Dumitru Staniloae argues for the significance of ‘potential’: “The East intuits the unbounded wealth of potentiality without which any act is something limited”. Constantin Noica describes Being as caught in-between the actual and the potential.

The nothing (4), usually thought of as a *meon* [non-Being], is potentiality of being, the beginning before the beginning. If one considers this thought further, one sees that it actually corresponds with Thorsten Botz-Bornstein's comment on the parallels between Japanese aesthetics and Byzantine aesthetics: "This means that through art, nothingness, though itself absolutely formless and invisible, can project itself into the visible world...Buddhist icons, like their Byzantine cousins, are not supposed to *represent* but to *be*." According to Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, the mute-optical element has priority. Acts of formalization create a reality of their own, a reality that is strictly a formal one, a style mediated only through style, a reality which presents nothing but itself - style as a virtual world, or, paradoxically, as virtual unreality. Byzantine painting and Zen art are forever resistant to and refuse the limit imposed by definition and conceptualization.

Botz-Bornstein also comments on Eastern Orthodox monastic practices: “It is worthwhile to mention here another form of meditation practiced in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, aimed at the experience of what a Church Father called «superluminescent darkness.» *Gold* was conceived as a kind of absolute «non-colour,» supposed to negate all other colours. The particular form of meditation pursued by these monks consisted in fixating on a pure gold background until the point when all other colours would disappear. The gold background was experienced as a kind of «absolute Nothingness,» as «the blackout of all objects, including the world of colour.»” (5)

Notwithstanding the unity and cohesion of Byzantine tradition, there is quite a stunning variety of stylistic solutions. One may explore stylistic variations both synchronically and diachronically by visually examining either the works of regional and local centers or the works of wandering painters.





St Neophyte monastery, Paphos, Cyprus, 12<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> centuries

<http://www.orthodoxy-icons.com/frescoes-of-cyprus/488-frescoes-of-cyprus-part-iii.html>



Panagia tou Arakou, Lagoudera, 12<sup>th</sup> century, Cyprus

<http://www.orthodoxy-icons.com/frescoes-of-cyprus/486-frescoes-of-cyprus.html>





Panagia tou Arakou, Lagoudera, 12<sup>th</sup> century, Cyprus  
<http://www.orthodoxy-icons.com/frescoes-of-cyprus/487-frescoes-of-cyprus-part-ii.html>



Byzantine Icon <http://www.orthodoxy-icons.com/byzantine-icons/419-byzantine-icons-part-ii.html>



Chora church, Istanbul, Turkey, 14<sup>th</sup> century  
[picasaweb.google.com/DavidRitchie43/TurkeyChoraChurchMosaics](https://picasaweb.google.com/DavidRitchie43/TurkeyChoraChurchMosaics)





St Nicholas princely court church, Curtea de Arges, Romania, 14<sup>th</sup> century  
[http://2.bp.blogspot.com/\\_9mrJNsvYMU/TITFiIynz7I/AAAAAAAAAC-Y/wo0vk7TvGjo/s1600/pilda+bogatului+la+sf+nicolae+domnesc.JPG](http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_9mrJNsvYMU/TITFiIynz7I/AAAAAAAAAC-Y/wo0vk7TvGjo/s1600/pilda+bogatului+la+sf+nicolae+domnesc.JPG)



Markov monastery, 14<sup>th</sup> century, Macedonia  
<https://picasaweb.google.com/110565005054412411555/OLxKPH#>



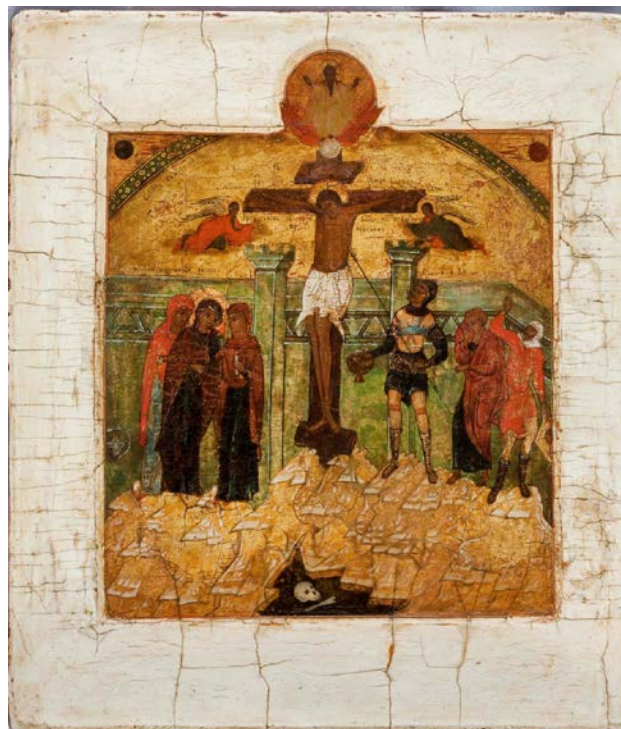
St Nicholas of Shishevo church, Matka, Macedonia

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Churches\\_in\\_the\\_Republic\\_of\\_Macedonia](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Churches_in_the_Republic_of_Macedonia)





Icons, 16<sup>th</sup> century, National Art Museum, Bucharest



Russia, 16<sup>th</sup> century

<http://www.russianicons.net/index2.php?lang=en&data=view&zoek=categorie&show=mu&id=214>



Vatopaidi monastery, mount Athos <http://www.pemptousia.com/2011/10/post-byzantine-wall-paintings/>



Vatopaidi monastery, mount Athos <http://www.pemptousia.com/2011/10/post-byzantine-wall-paintings/>





Russia, 16<sup>th</sup> century <http://www.kunstauktionen-duesseldorf.de/en/katalogdetails/24/245/2>





Greece, 1600 [http://www.ikonengalerie-von-kuelmer.de/index\\_frame.php?cat=4](http://www.ikonengalerie-von-kuelmer.de/index_frame.php?cat=4)





Russia, 1600 [http://www.ikonengalerie-von-kuelmer.de/index\\_frame.php?cat=3](http://www.ikonengalerie-von-kuelmer.de/index_frame.php?cat=3)



Bulgaria or Romania, 17<sup>th</sup> century  
[http://www.ikonengalerie-von-kuelmer.de/index\\_frame.php?cat=4](http://www.ikonengalerie-von-kuelmer.de/index_frame.php?cat=4)





Crete, 17<sup>th</sup> century <http://www.templegallery.com/main.php?mode=3&p1=1964>





Tudoran zographer, Dormition church, Bajesti, Romania, 17<sup>th</sup> century  
<http://www.biserici.org/index.php?menu=BIAG&code=4185&criteria=&quick=&radio=b&order=P.TOWN,C.NAME,P.NAME>



Tudoran zographer, Dormition church, Bajesti, Romania, 17<sup>th</sup> century  
<http://www.biserici.org/index.php?menu=BIAG&code=4185&criteria=&quick=&radio=b&order=P.TOWN,C.NAME,P.NAME>



Parvu Mutu zographer, Sinaia monastery, the old church, built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century,  
Romania <https://picasaweb.google.com/toubib46/SinaiaMonastery>





Greece, 17<sup>th</sup> century

<http://www.templegallery.com/main.php?mode=3&p1=1355>





Greece, 18<sup>th</sup> century [http://www.wannenesgroup.com/img/visualizzatore/asta85\\_779.jpg](http://www.wannenesgroup.com/img/visualizzatore/asta85_779.jpg)





Balkans, 18<sup>th</sup> century [http://www.ikonengalerie-von-kuelmer.de/index\\_frame.php?cat=4](http://www.ikonengalerie-von-kuelmer.de/index_frame.php?cat=4)

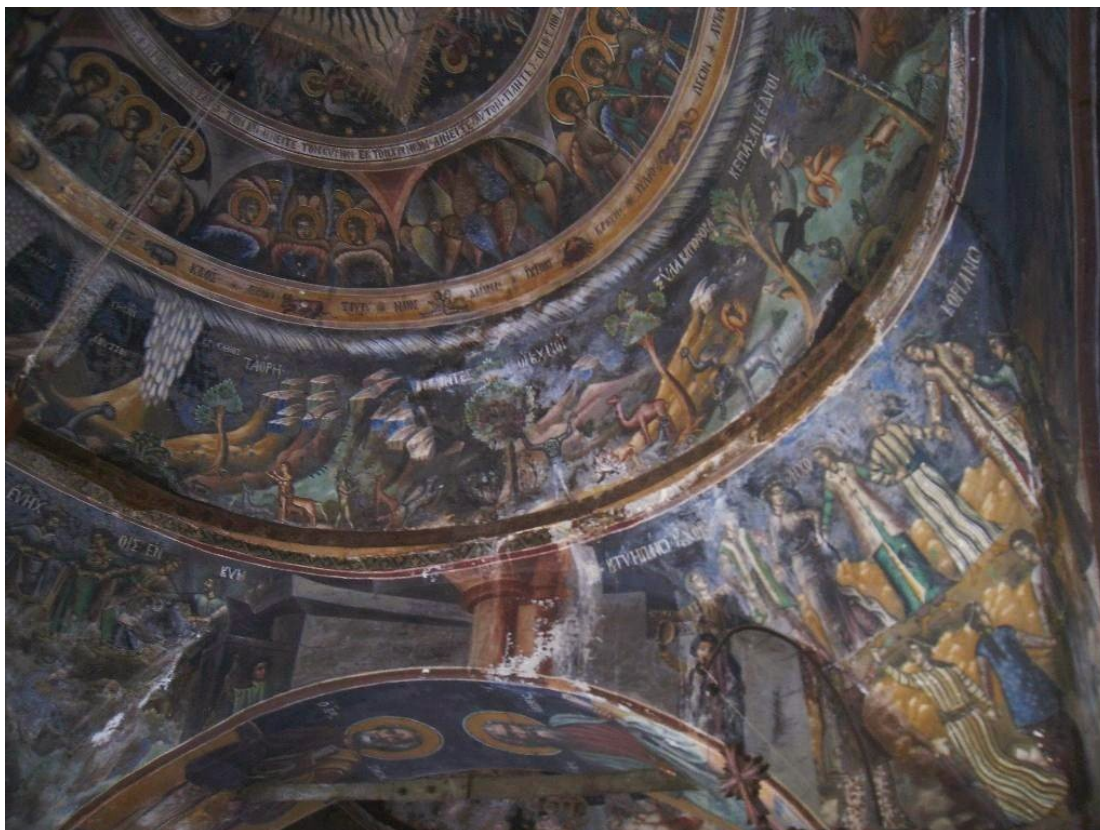




St John the Baptist church (Bradu hermitage), Gurguiata, Romania,  
18<sup>th</sup> century

<http://www.biserici.org/index.php?menu=BI&code=438>





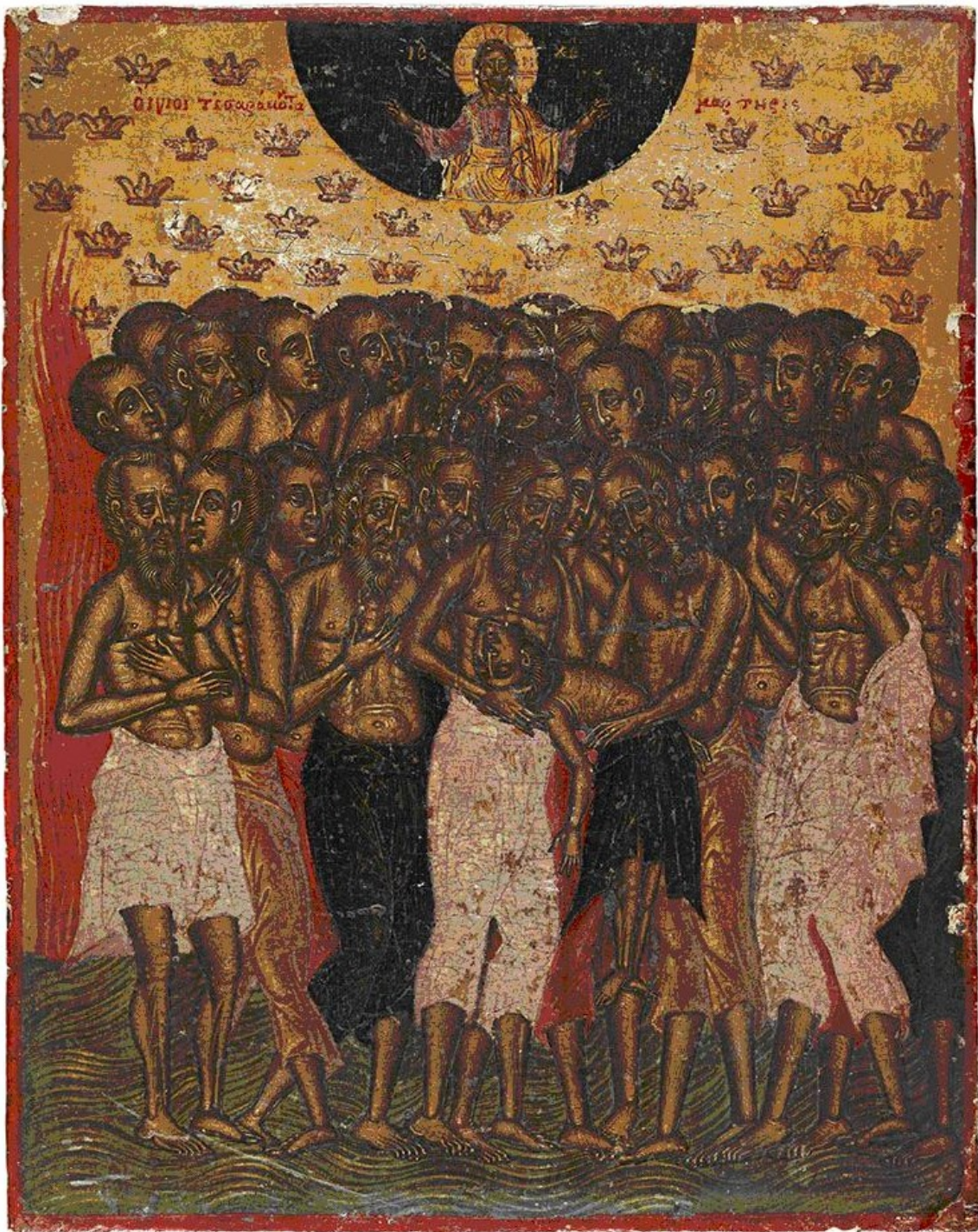
Koutloumoussiou monastery, mount Athos  
<http://athos.weblog.nl/files/2012/02/03-10-Koutloumoussiou-fresco-6.jpg>



Russia, 19<sup>th</sup> century

<http://www.templegallery.com/main.php?mode=4&p1=1766&p2=0&p3=0>





Greece, 19<sup>th</sup> century <http://www.kunstauktionen-duesseldorf.de/en/katalogdetails/16/225/3>





Jgheaburi hermitage, Ilie from Teius and Constantin from Zmeurat zographers,  
1826-1828, Romania [http://www.valueromania.ro/atmo-  
uploads/foto/f86b8e8c4148d9dc4be51e02ff0f165214bc660d.jpg](http://www.valueromania.ro/atmo-uploads/foto/f86b8e8c4148d9dc4be51e02ff0f165214bc660d.jpg)





Jgheaburi hermitage, Ilie from Teius and Constantin from Zmeurat zographers, 1826-1828, Romania <http://www.valueromania.ro/1774/ctitori>



Holy Archangels wood church, Titerlesti, Mehedinti county, Romania, 1825, photo Tetcu Mircea Rares



Holy Archangels wood church, Titerlești, Mehedinți county, Romania, 1825,  
photo Tetcu Mircea Rares





Ravanica monastery, Serbia, 1850 fresco  
[picasaweb.google.com/lh/photo/R26PagtNV4fPsQm9MXIVeA](https://picasaweb.google.com/lh/photo/R26PagtNV4fPsQm9MXIVeA)



Greece, 19<sup>th</sup> century  
<http://www.templegallery.com/main.php?mode=4&p1=1588&p2=0&p3=0>

The craft of painting is a medium of forms. An artist uses every formal device available to him. Examples of Renaissance art circulated in numerous woodcuts and engravings and appropriation has always been part of the painter's creative tools. It is no surprise, then, that Byzantine painters often appropriated and adapted Western formal devices.



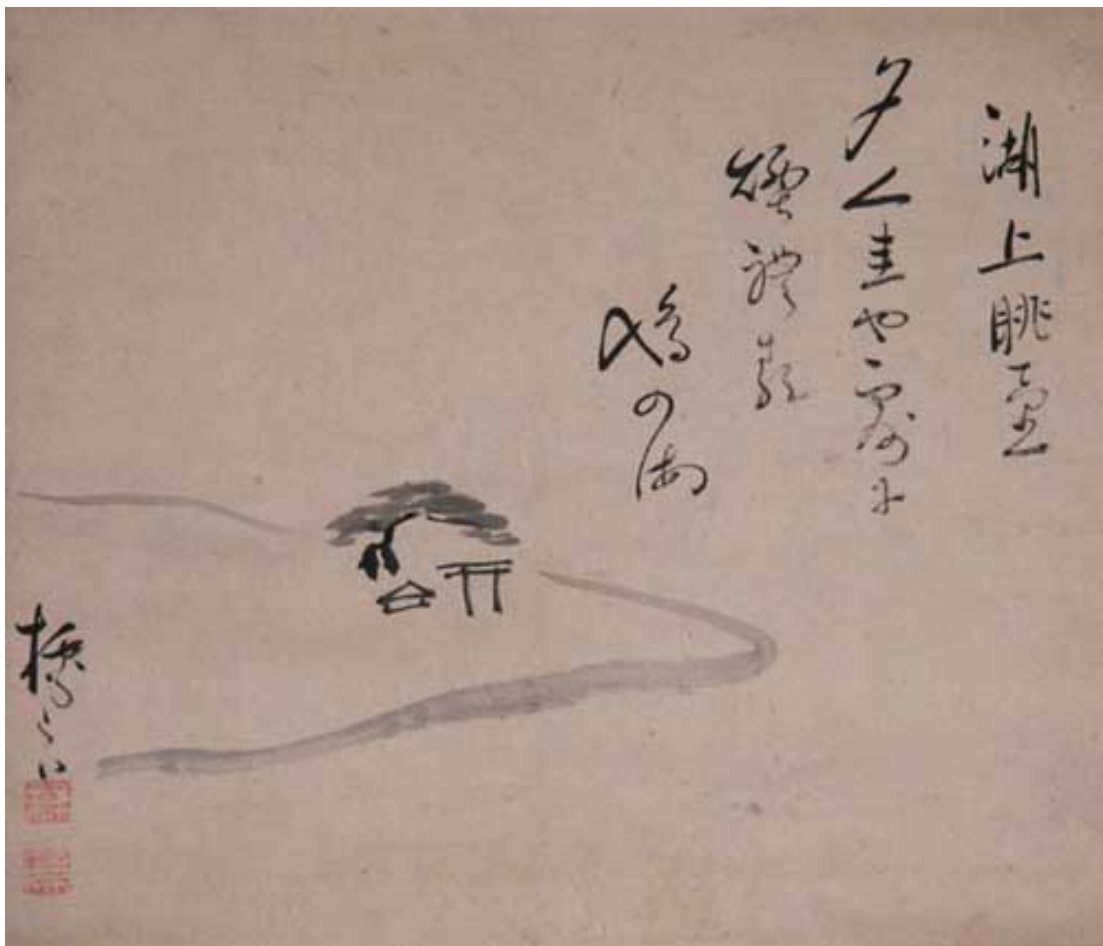
Theophanes Strelitzas the Cretan, Stavronikita monastery, mount Athos, 16<sup>th</sup> century  
<http://www.orthodoxy-icons.com/icons/mountathos/282-monastery-stavronikita-athos-part-ii.html>



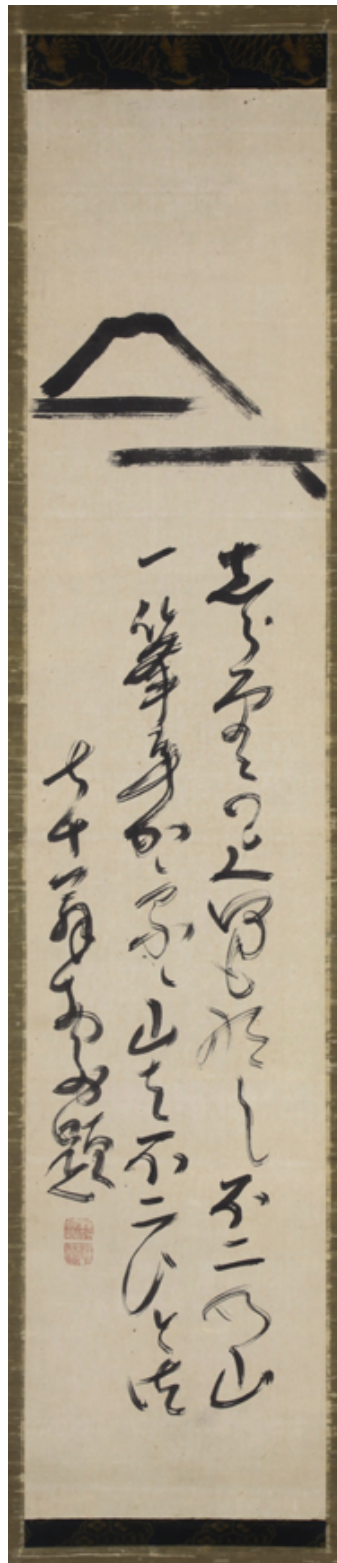


Greece, 18<sup>th</sup> century <http://www.kunstauktionen-duesseldorf.de/de/katalogdetails/20/28/3>

Japanese philosopher Nishida Kitaro (1870-1945) believed that true creativity is not the product of consciousness but rather the "phenomenon of life itself." True creation, he stated, must arise from *mu-shin*, the state of "no-mind", in which thought, emotions, and expectations do not matter. Although the product of intense "practice", truly skillful Zen brushwork is best achieved as the product of the "no-mind" state, a high level of spirituality, and a heart free of disturbances. To draw Zen calligraphic form, one must focus intensely and become one with the form. Becoming one with what one creates, essentially, is the philosophy behind Zen inspired art.



Yosa Buson, 1716-1783, poet  
[www.japonia.org.pl/?q=node/75](http://www.japonia.org.pl/?q=node/75)

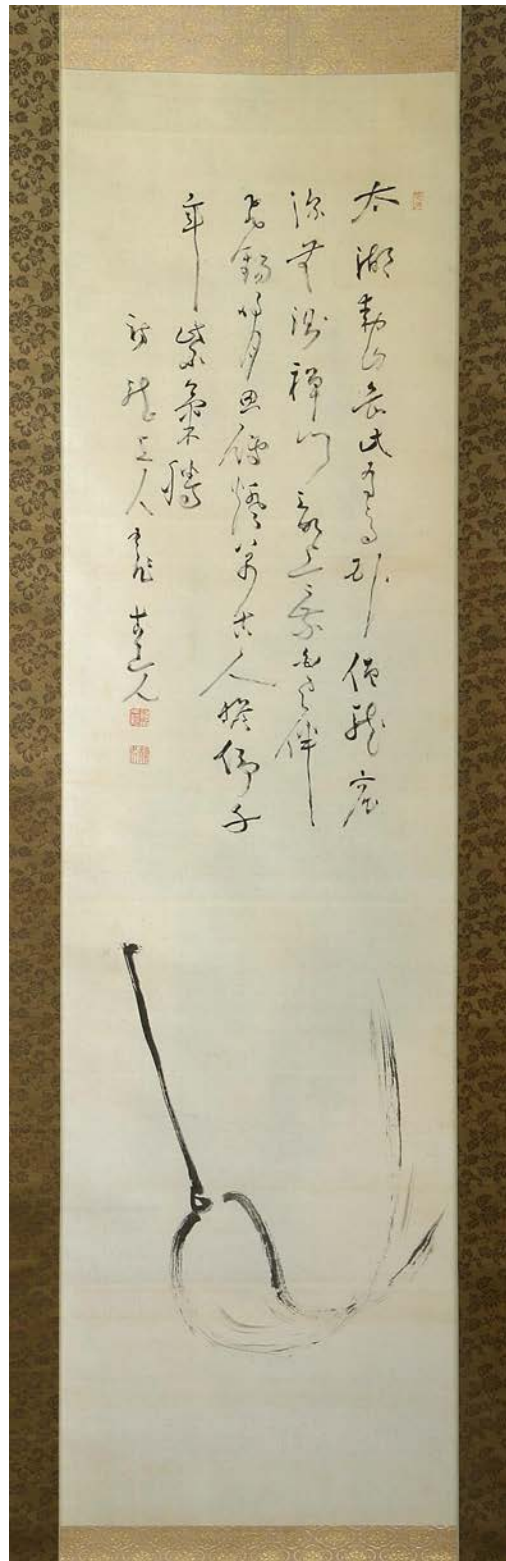


Motsugai Fusen, 1794-1867, Soto sect  
<http://web.kyoto-inet.or.jp/org/jikyu-an/8428.html>





Takabatake Shikibu, 1785-1881, poetess  
[www.asianart.com/BachmannEckenstein/d9410.html](http://www.asianart.com/BachmannEckenstein/d9410.html)



Fukuda Kodojin, 1865-1944, poet  
<http://www.asianart.com/BachmannEckenstein/4.html>



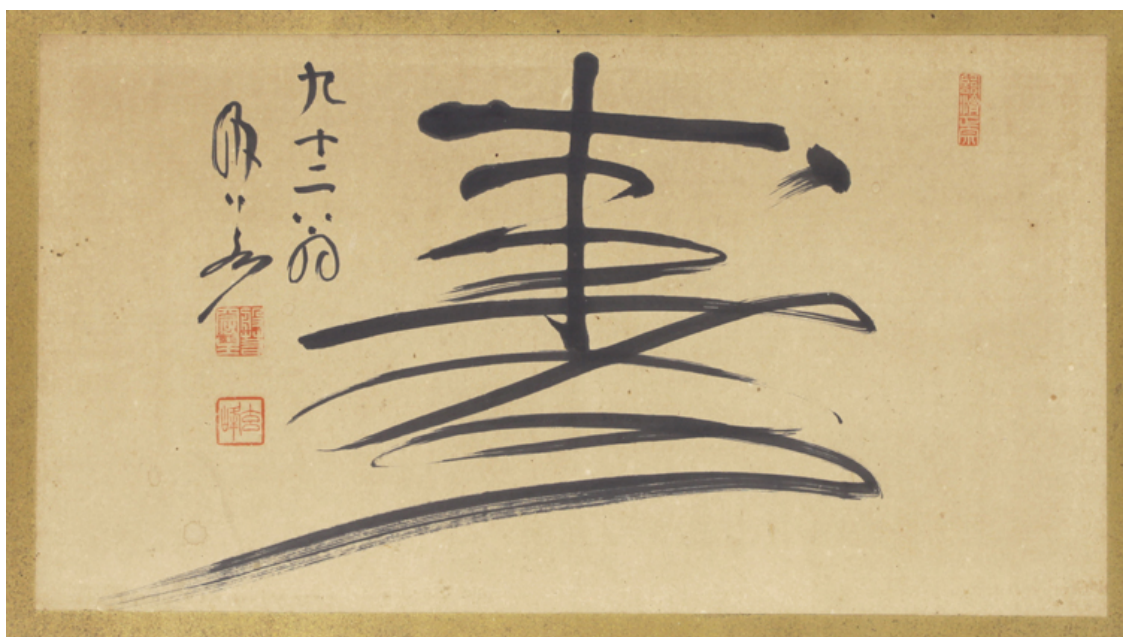
Fukada Chokujo, 1883-1947, painter  
<http://www.asianart.com/BachmannEckenstein/6.html>





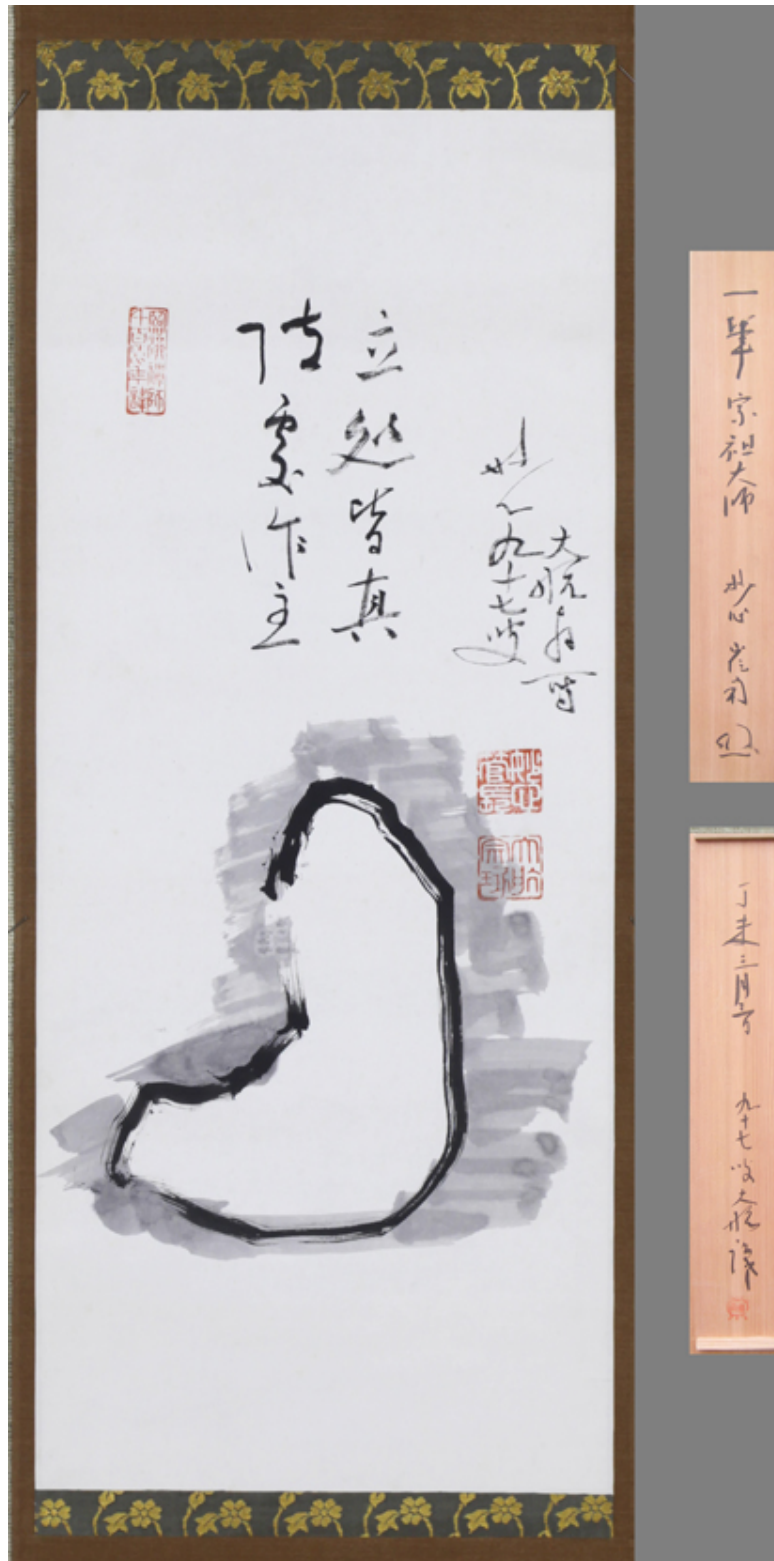
Tokutomi Soho, 1863-1957, journalist, historian

[http://www.asianart.com/BachmannEckenstein/large/Large\\_2193-1\\_\(Individuell\).JPG](http://www.asianart.com/BachmannEckenstein/large/Large_2193-1_(Individuell).JPG)



Yamamoto Gempo, 1866-1961, Rinzai sect

<http://web.kyoto-inet.or.jp/org/jikyu-an/9123.html>

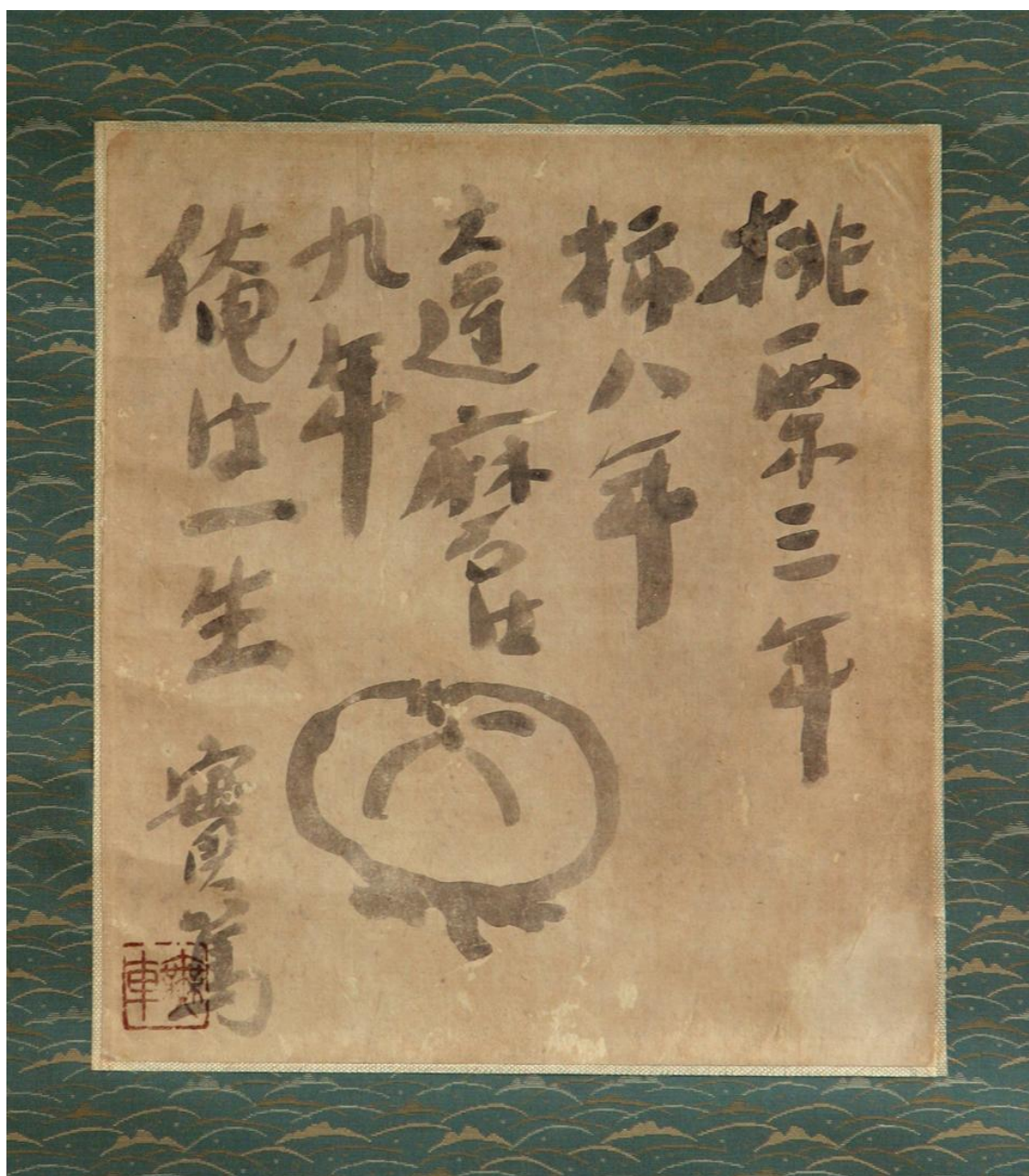


(Furukawa)Taiko Sotaku, 1871-1968, Rinzai sect  
<http://www.jikyu-an.com/9056.html>



(Furukawa) Taiko Sotaku, 1871-1968, Rinzai sect  
<http://www.shogaya.com/indexe.html>





Mushanokoji Saneatsu, 1885-1976, writer

[http://www.bachmanneckenstein.com/exhibitions/past/2012/Asia\\_Week/images/2126-1.JPG](http://www.bachmanneckenstein.com/exhibitions/past/2012/Asia_Week/images/2126-1.JPG)



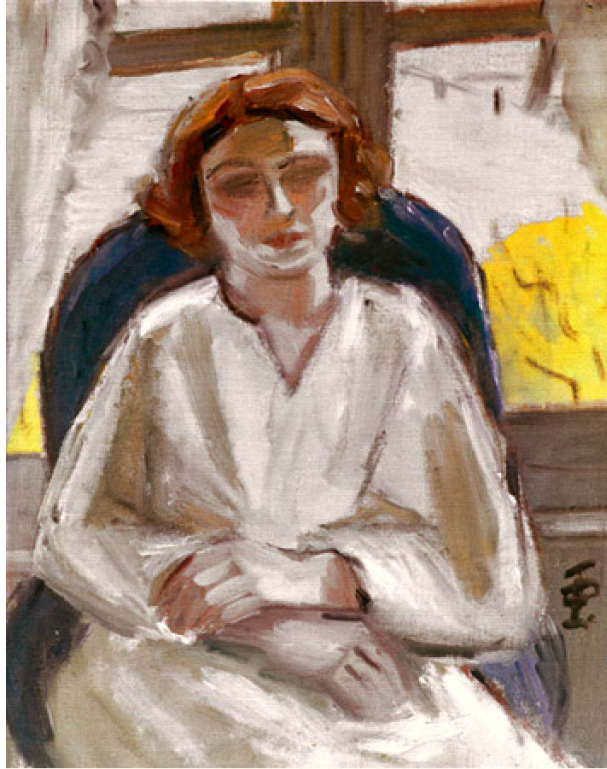
Hirata Seiko, 1924-2008, philosopher, Rinzai sect  
[http://intranet.shambhala.com/assets/skins/shambhala\\_skin/images/products\\_lg/2354.jpg](http://intranet.shambhala.com/assets/skins/shambhala_skin/images/products_lg/2354.jpg)



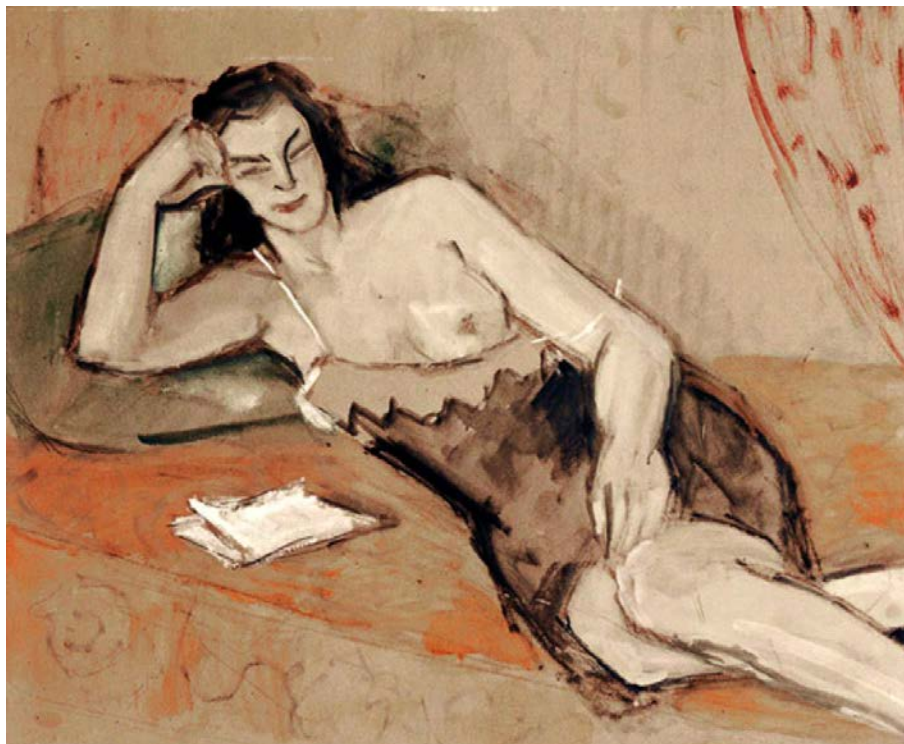
Niklas Luhmann wrote: “ Signs are also forms, that means marked distinctions...But the form itself (and only this should be named sign) has no reference; it functions only as a distinction, and that only when it is actually used as such”. He also remarked: “Forms convince by implicit self-reference. They propose themselves. They...resist further decomposition...In this sense they have a ritualistic quality...”



Theodor Pallady <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/pallady-theodor/>



Theodor Pallady



Theodor Pallady





Theodor Pallady



Theodor Pallady



Theodor Pallady <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/pallady-theodor/>



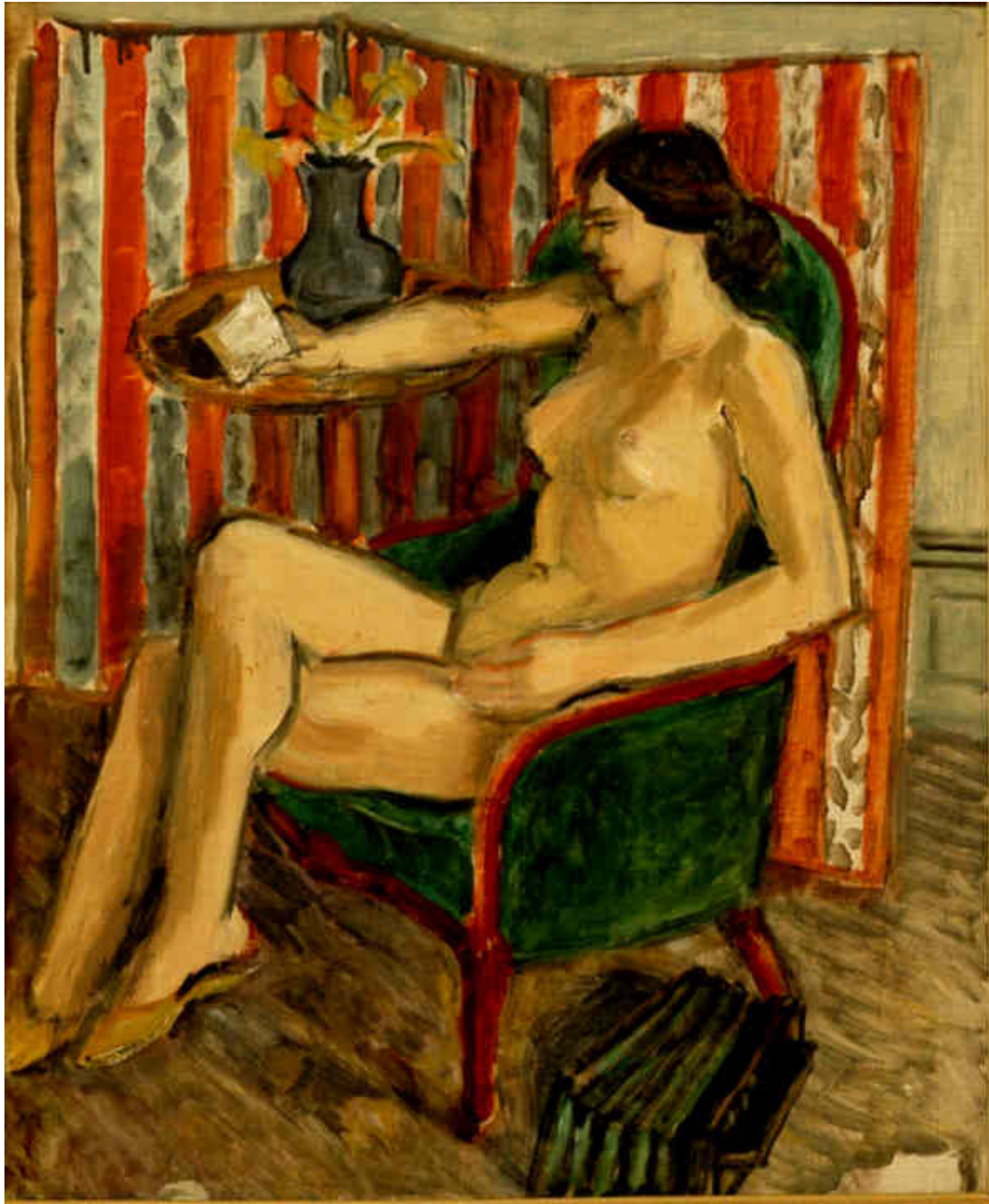


Theodor Pallady <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/pallady-theodor/>



Theodor Pallady <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/pallady-theodor/>





Theodor Pallady



Theodor Pallady <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/pallady-theodor/>



Theodor Pallady <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/pallady-theodor/>





Theodor Pallady <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/pallady-theodor/>



Theodor Pallady <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/pallady-theodor/>





Theodor Pallady



Theodor Pallady <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/pallady-theodor/>





Theodor Pallady <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/pallady-theodor/>



Theodor Pallady <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/pallady-theodor/>



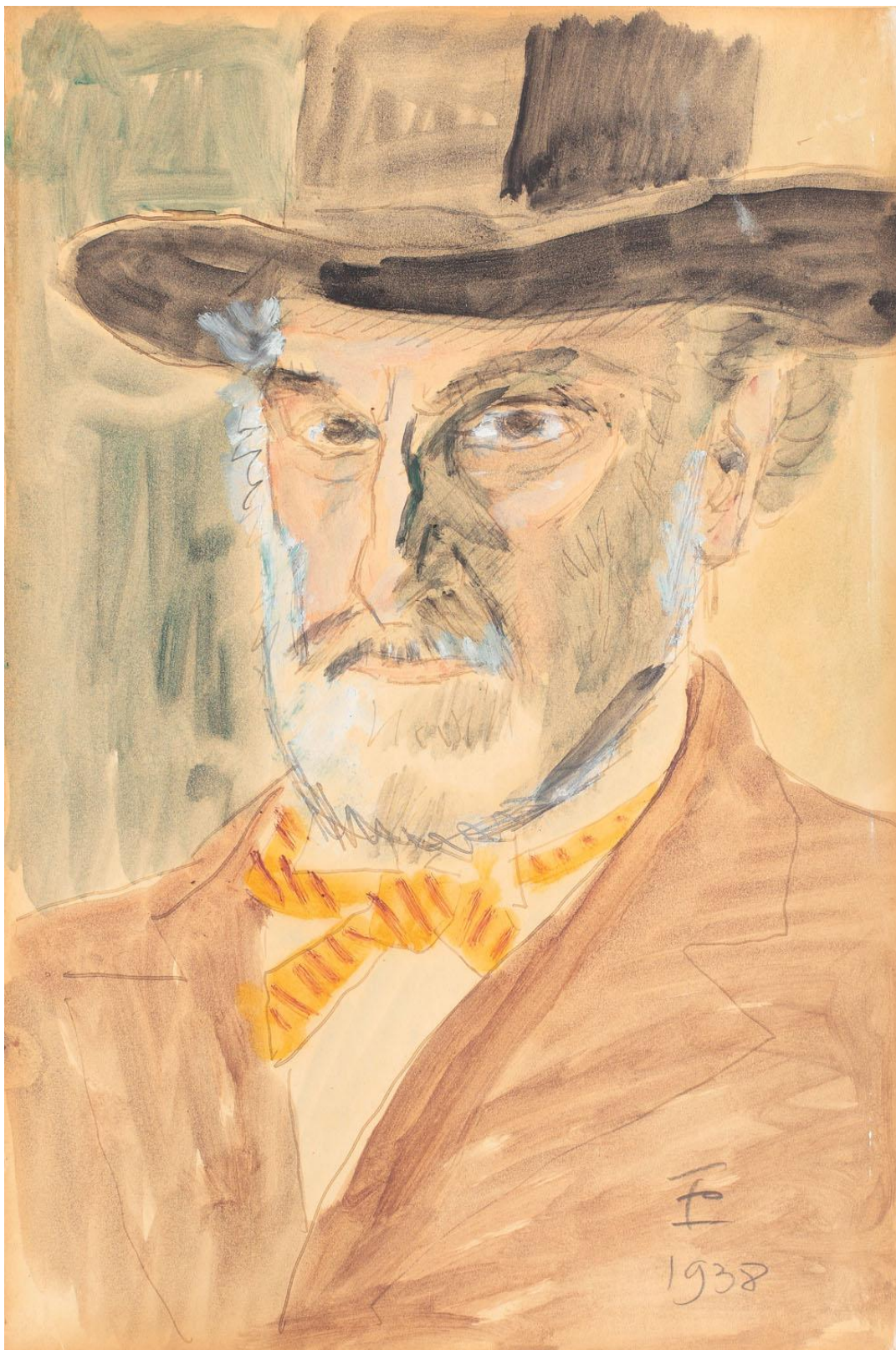


Theodor Pallady <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/pallady-theodor/>



Theodor Pallady <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/pallady-theodor/>





Theodor Pallady





Gheorghe Petrasu <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/petrascu-gheorghe-2/>



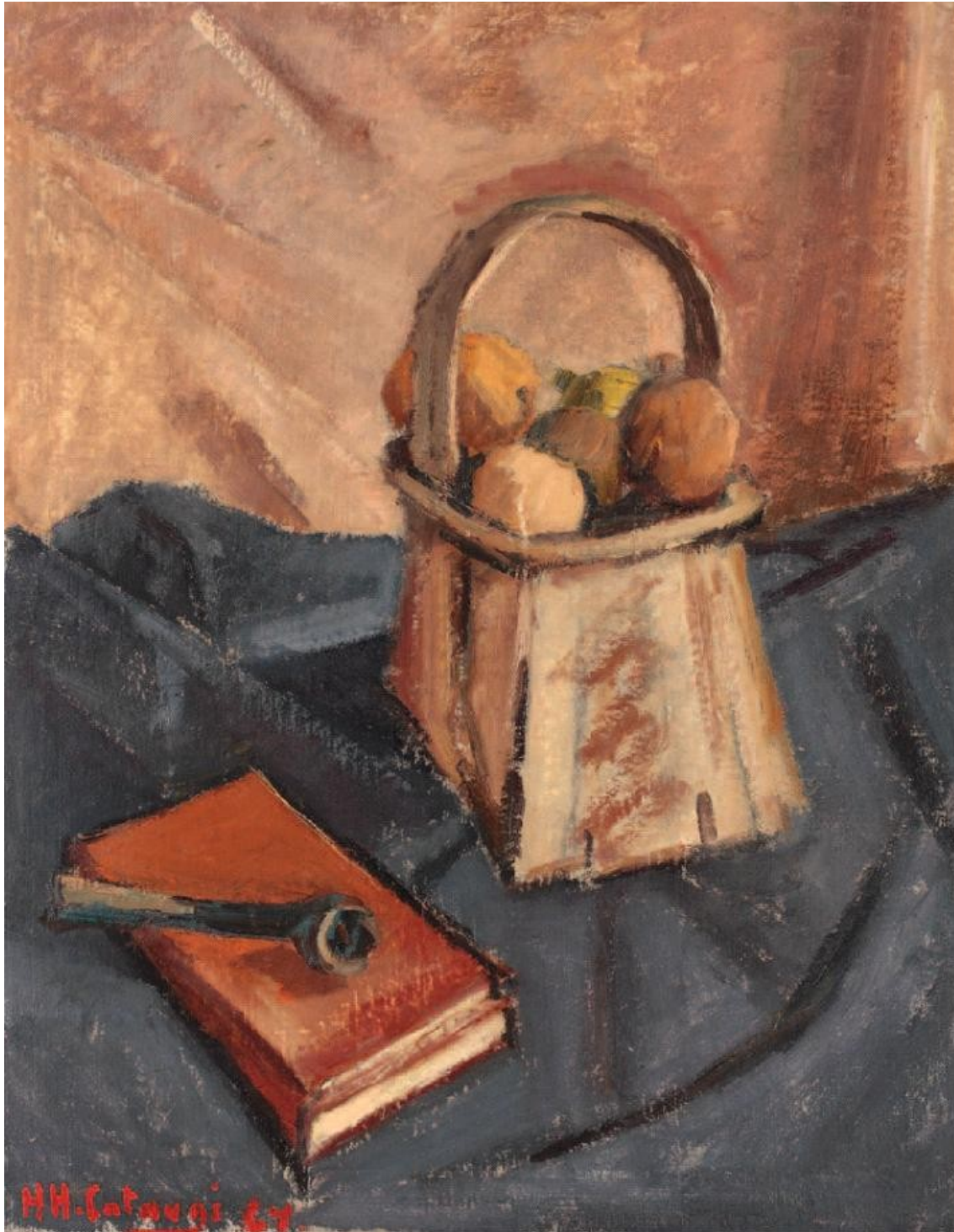
Gheorghe Petrasu <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/petrascu-gheorghe-2/>





Gheorghe Petrescu <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/petrescu-gheorghe-2/>



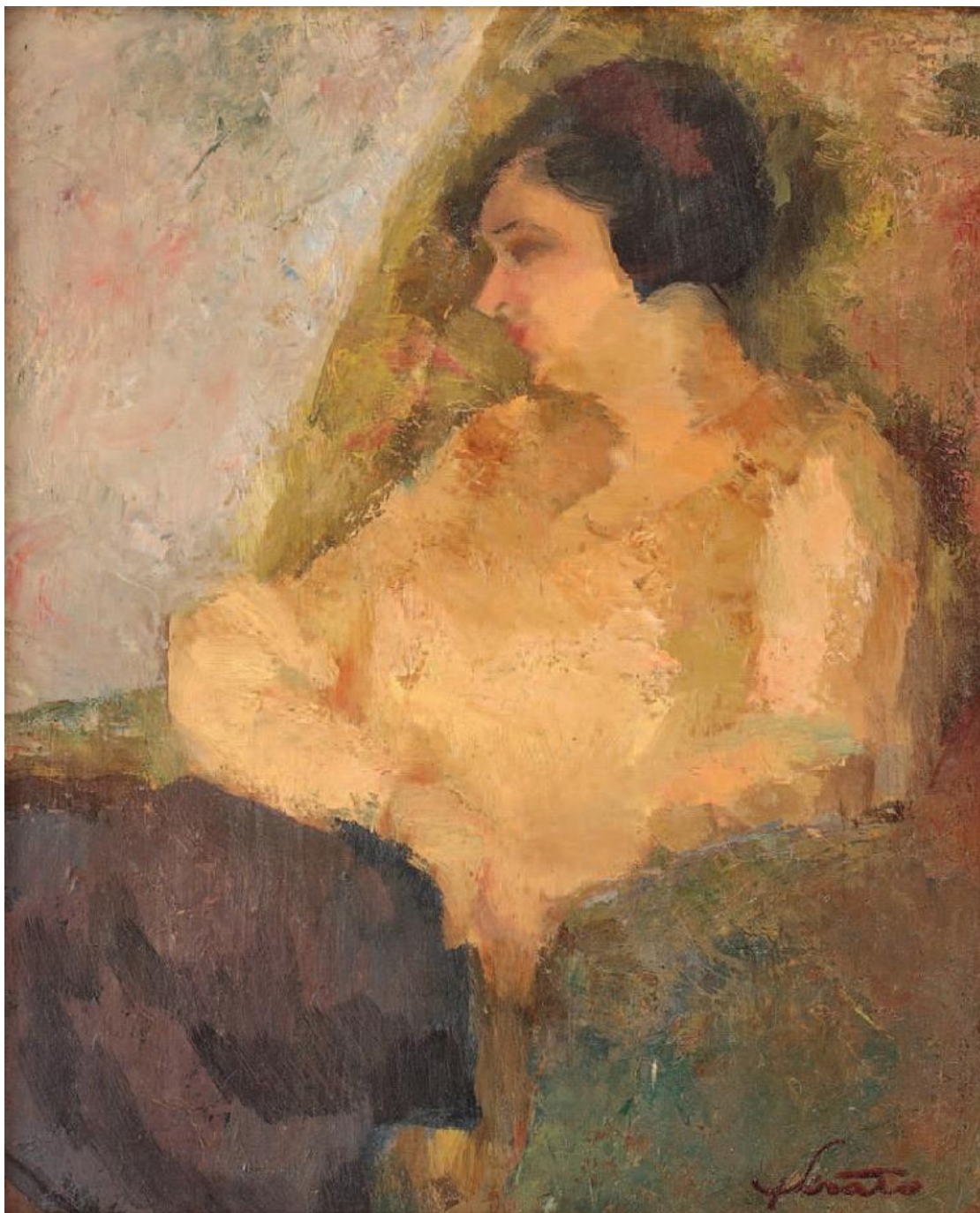


Henri Catargi



Henri Catargi <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/catargi-henri-h/>





Francisc Sirato



Francisc Sirato <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/sirato-francisc-2/>



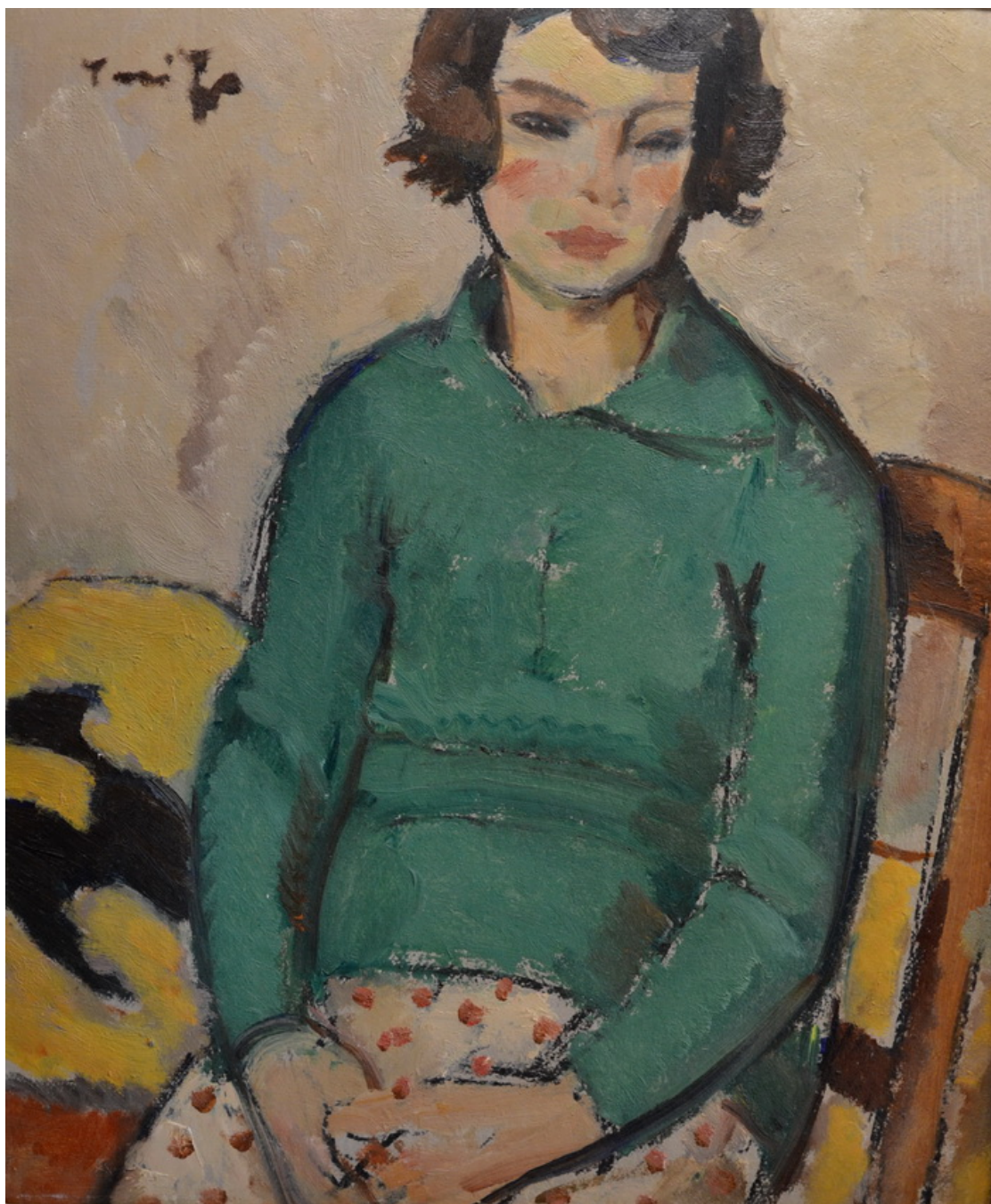


Francisc Sirato



Nicolae Tonitza <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/tonitza-nicolae/>





Nicolae Tonitza <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/tonitza-nicolae/>



Nicolae Tonitza <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/tonitza-nicolae/>





Nicolae Tonitza <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/tonitza-nicolae/>



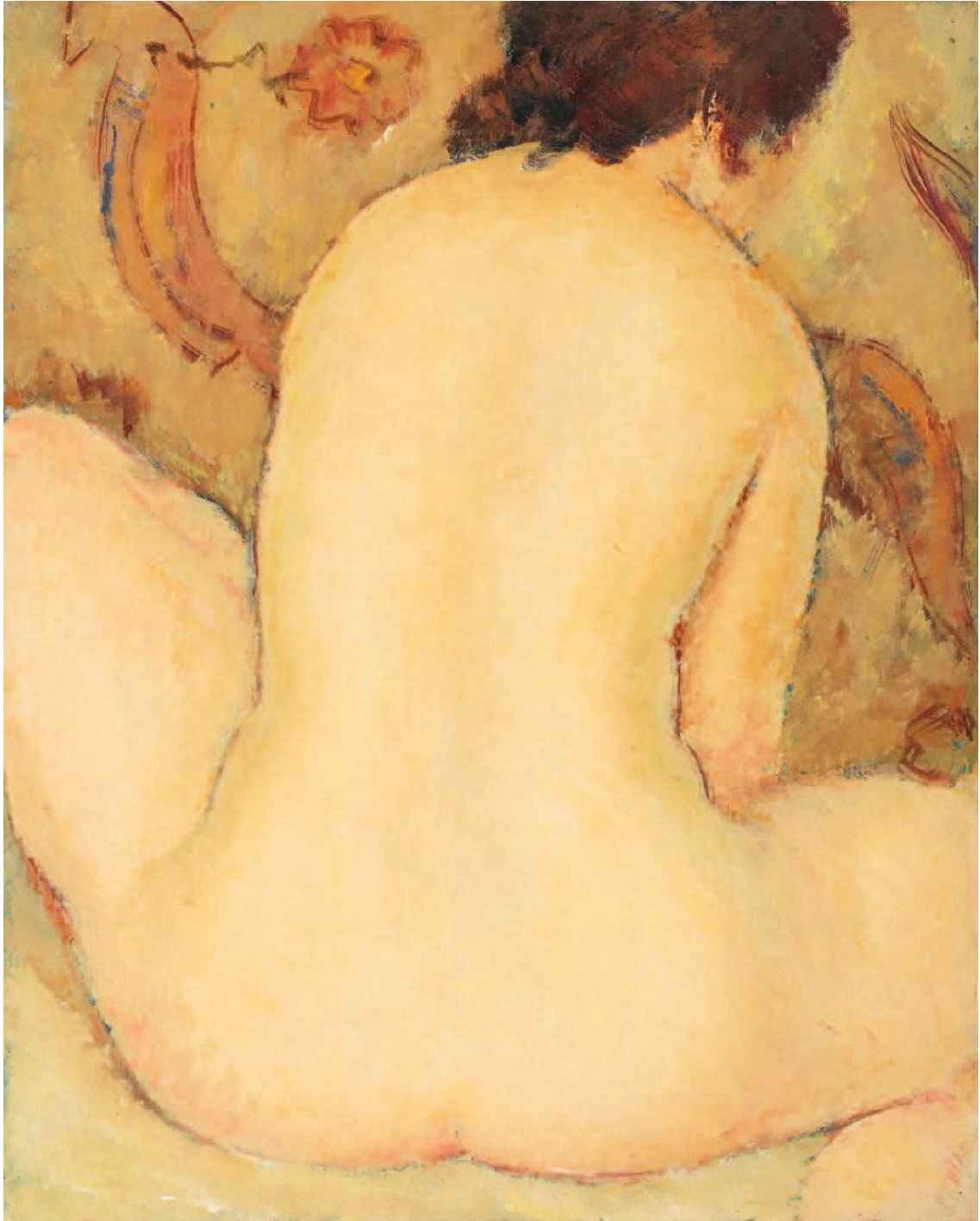
Nicolae Tonitza <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/tonitza-nicolae/>



The aforementioned parallels between Japanese aesthetics and Byzantine aesthetics may explain why Nicolae Tonitza engaged in appropriating formal devices typical of traditional Japanese painterly practice. In Zen terms, the form becomes the painter's *koan*.



Nicolae Tonitza



Nicolae Tonitza





Nicolae Tonitza [http://artindex.ro/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/nicolae\\_tonitza\\_14.jpg](http://artindex.ro/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/nicolae_tonitza_14.jpg)



Nicolae Tonitza



Nicolae Tonitza





Nicolae Tonitza



Nicolae Tonitza





Nicolae Tonitza



Nicolae Tonitza <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/tonitza-nicolae/>





Nicolae Tonitza



Nicolae Tonitza <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/tonitza-nicolae/>



Nicolae Tonitza <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/tonitza-nicolae/>



Nicolae Tonitza <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/tonitza-nicolae/>



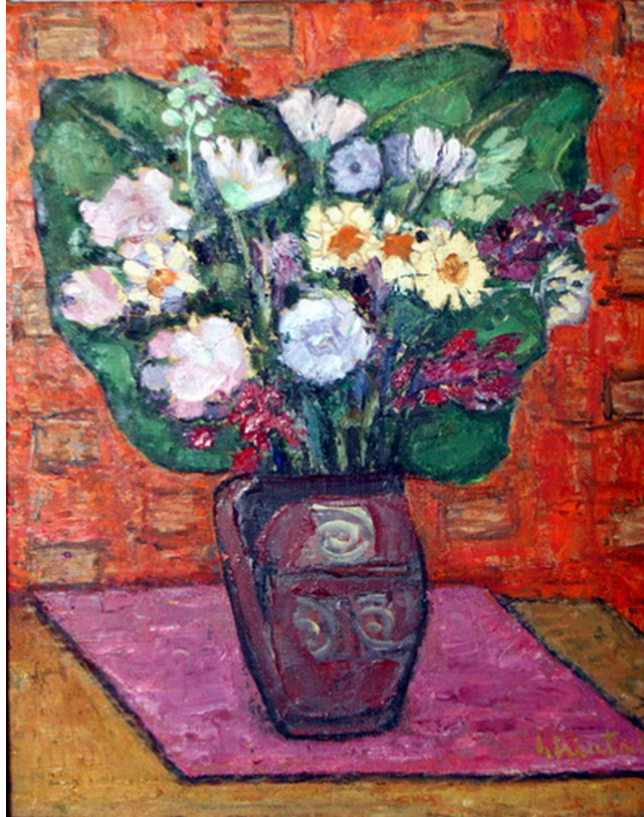
Nae Ionescu observes: "The lonely human...can not intervene in history...he can only *cultivate*" [the Latin *colere*, to cultivate, refers to both culture and tilling the soil, and is related to *cultus*, care, adoration]. In the final instance, the abyssal stylistic matrices are surfacing to light. An all-embracing interwoven web of operational cultural dynamics, strongly embedded in Eastern and/or Far Eastern spirituality and entwined in paradox, disseminates over different models a practice simultaneously underpinning and negating human understanding.



Alexandru Ciucurencu



Alexandru Ciucurencu



Dumitru Ghiata <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/ghiata-dumitru-2/>



Dumitru Ghiata <http://artindex.ro/2012/05/16/ghiata-dumitru-2/>





Nicolas de Staël <http://p9.storage.canalblog.com/93/56/119589/46833836.png>

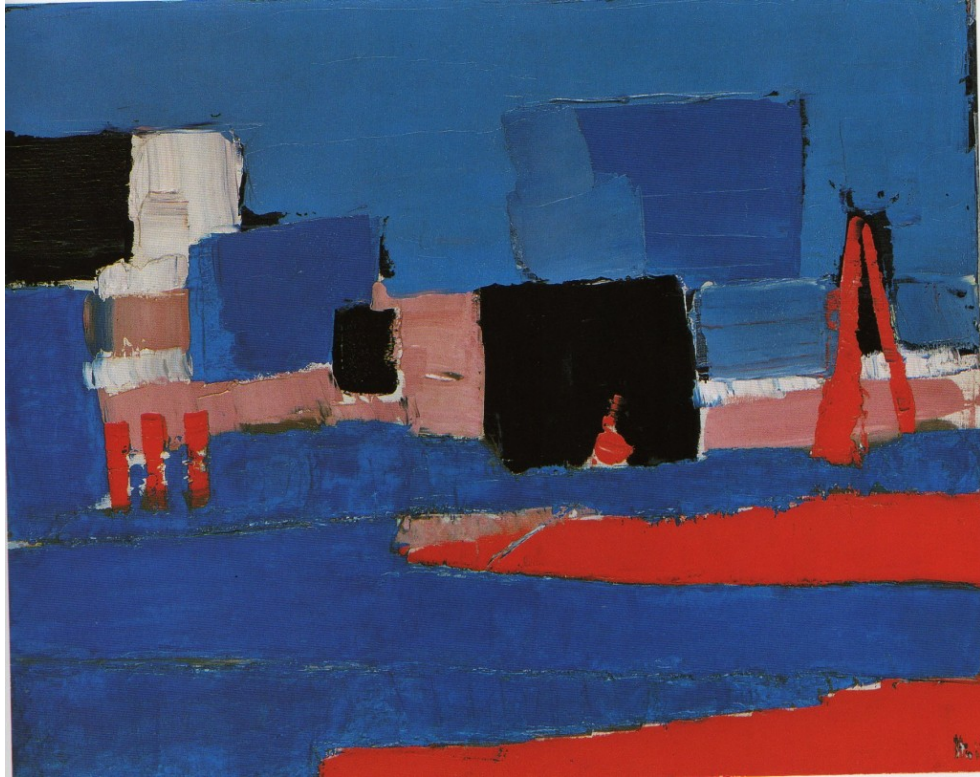


Nicolas de Stael



Nicolas de Staël [http://www.artcurial.com/fr/actualite/cp/2011/\\_media/TM-TC-3oeuvres/de-stael.jpg](http://www.artcurial.com/fr/actualite/cp/2011/_media/TM-TC-3oeuvres/de-stael.jpg)





Nicolas de Staël <http://textespretextes.blogs.lalibre.be/media/02/00/312926975.jpg>



Nicolas de Stael [gesah.blogspot.com/2009/06/from-elqui-1-to-more-fields-via-de....](http://gesah.blogspot.com/2009/06/from-elqui-1-to-more-fields-via-de....)



Serge Poliakoff <http://www.lempertz.com/typo3temp/pics/a5a2a50ade.jpg>



Serge Poliakoff  
[http://157.164.136.233/jahia/webdav/site/beaux\\_arts\\_mons/shared/IMAGES/BAM/expos\\_precedentes/Poliakoff/poliakok6.jpg](http://157.164.136.233/jahia/webdav/site/beaux_arts_mons/shared/IMAGES/BAM/expos_precedentes/Poliakoff/poliakok6.jpg)





Serge Poliakoff

<http://www.artcurial.com/fr/asp/fullCatalogue.asp?salelot=1458++++613+&refno=10239418>



Julius Bissier <http://ais.badische-zeitung.de/piece/02/de/39/6a/48118122.jpg>



Julius Bissier [http://www.adhikara.com/julius-bissier/Julius\\_Bissier\\_1.jpg](http://www.adhikara.com/julius-bissier/Julius_Bissier_1.jpg)



Julius Bissier  
[http://67.20.76.104/~centerh6/media/catalog/product/cache/1/thumbnail/569x/9df78eab33525d08d6e5fb8d27136e95/c/e/center44\\_050411-2610.jpg](http://67.20.76.104/~centerh6/media/catalog/product/cache/1/thumbnail/569x/9df78eab33525d08d6e5fb8d27136e95/c/e/center44_050411-2610.jpg)





Julius Bissier [http://www.tate.org.uk/art/images/work/T/T00/T00362\\_10.jpg](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/images/work/T/T00/T00362_10.jpg)

#### Footnotes:

(1) Simona Modreanu, *Trei scriitori in cautarea luminii*[I], Convorbiri Literare, August 2005

(2) Nicolae Steinhardt has written: "There is no Ariadne's thread for the reflexive labyrinth. One has to make one's way by oneself, alone with oneself and with one's Being, a Being equally unknown to oneself and to all around..."

(3) The term *autopoiesis*, meaning self-creation, has been introduced by the biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela. Niklas Luhmann applied the concept to sociology.

(4) Nae Ionescu once said: "Nothing...is a logical position facing something of a non-logical nature: nothing is 'a something else' facing 'something' to which all existence is reduced - arbitrarily, without doubt, but effectively - by being alive". (Cited in Isabela Vasiliu-Scraba, *Unitatea fiintei. Un obscur pasaj din dialogul platonice "Parmenide" si*

*consideratiile lui Nae Ionescu despre “nimic”,*  
[http://www.geocities.com/isabelavs/Nae\\_Ionescu/CAP\\_XI.html](http://www.geocities.com/isabelavs/Nae_Ionescu/CAP_XI.html) )

(5) Konrad Onasch & Annemarie Schnieper, *Icons: The Fascination and Reality*, New York: Riverside, 1997, p. 287, cited in Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, *Virtual Reality and Virtual Irreality On Noh-Plays and Icons (Part 1)*,  
[http://www.pravmir.com/article\\_810.html](http://www.pravmir.com/article_810.html)